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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Wednesday, January 10, 1934.

How do you do, Everybody:

Maybe it seems a little late to be wishing you a Happy New Year, with almost 10 days of January gone. But it's my first chance since the New Year came in, and I do have high hopes that 1934 is going to turn out a happier year for us all.

Of course, one way for us to be happy is to be healthy. At least the two are tied up together. So along with my New Year's wishes, I'm going to pass on to you some suggestions about diet which I got from Dr. Hazel Munsell, our nutrition specialist. You remember her, I'm sure, she came up to the studio with me one day last spring and talked about the interesting tests she is making on the vitamins in eggs, particularly the vitamin D in the yolk of eggs.

The day I went down to talk to Dr. Munsell last week was one of those dull gray cold rainy days we had seven of in a stretch - the kind of weather that some people say breeds colds. So when I found Dr. Munsell in her laboratory, I began popping questions at her about diets that prevent colds. Now as you probably gathered when you heard Dr. Munsell talk last spring, she's a very careful scientific worker. She doesn't make statements unless she has facts to prove them. So she smiled at my questions, but she shook her head. Then she went on to say:

"I wish I could give you a diet that would prevent colds. But I don't think there is any such thing any more than there's a diet that prevents measles. A cold is an infection. Of course, if you look at it this way, the right kind of a diet helps to prevent any kind of infection. A good diet with plenty of vitamins and minerals and all the other food substances the body needs certainly does help to keep it in good trim. Good fighting trim, you might say. For the body has to fight continually against the bacteria that cause colds and against other sources of infection. Just as soon as the body loses tone, as soon as its resistance is lowered, then it can't fight the cold germs so well, and the next thing we know we're in for a good old-fashioned head cold or tonsillitis or both. Naturally if you eat a lot of rich heavy foods and get your digestive tract upset, and especially if you get constipated so that waste matter isn't carried off in the usual way, you're bound to be that much more vulnerable to colds." And that's what Dr. Munsell had to say on my first question.

Next I asked her about the theory of alkaline diets and diets that have an acid reaction in the body, and whether they have any relation to colds. Unquestionably they do, she thinks. There is plenty of evidence that a diet that keeps the body alkaline is a safeguard against colds. If the body gets into an acid condition and you are exposed to a lot of lively cold bacteria, your body is only too ready to entertain them.

(over)

The queer thing to those of us who aren't chemists, is that the foods that taste acid on the tongue have the alkaline reaction in the body after we eat them. Take grapefruit, for example. Sour as it is, grapefruit helps to make the body alkaline. And so do oranges and tomatoes, and most other fruits and vegetables. Milk is another alkaline, or base-forming food. In the acid-forming group are meat and eggs and fish, in other words the protein foods, and also bread and cereals. By the way, if you'd like a list of foods to show you which belong to the alkaline and which belong to the acid-forming group, write me and I'll be glad to send it to you.

Probably you've noticed many advertisements of vitamin preparations, especially those rich in vitamin A, said to prevent or cure colds. I asked Dr. Munsell about those. Again she shook her head, and then she explained how that idea got started about vitamin A curing or preventing colds. It's this way. When animals or humans, either one, eat for week after week and month after month food that contains very little or no vitamin A, their eyes begin to get sore, and their sinuses and the mucous membranes of the nose and throat and lungs become infected. These are the very tissues of course that colds attack. And it is true that a diet rich in vitamin A does help to keep these tissues healthy and so able to withstand the cold bacteria. But Dr. Munsell doesn't believe in calling vitamin A the anti-infective vitamin. And she doesn't believe in dosing yourself with all sorts of vitamin A preparations unless a physician prescribes them. She believes it's much wiser to get your vitamin supply from natural sources. A good generous helping of spinach or some other green leafy vegetable is a much safer bet as a source of vitamins than cough drops or chocolate candy supposed to be fairly bursting with vitamins.

The yellow and green colors in vegetables are good ones to follow if you want vitamin A. This holds to a considerable extent with fruits also. You'll find vitamin A in apricots, bananas, yellow peaches, muskmelon, and many others.

As you probably know, butter and cream, and liver, are all good sources of vitamin A among the animal products. And cod-liver oil comes at the head of the list. Cod-liver oil is also rich in vitamin D. But as Kipling says, "that's another story." So I'll have to let that go over to another day.

Goodbye, for this time.